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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child

Statement submitted by the Legião da Boa Vontade, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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Statement

Contributing to the 51st Commission on the Status of Women, the Legião da Boa Vontade – LBV (Legion of Good Will – LGW), a Brazilian civil society organization with general consultative status at the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), submits its recommendations and best practices in dealing with the main theme "The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child", to be discussed between 26 February to 9 March of 2007, at the United Nations Headquarters, in New York.

One of the most ancient forms of violation of gender committed in all societies, without a doubt is the violence against the girl-child. An abusive act that does not see social class, income, culture or ethnics. It is a complex problem manifested in different ways, and most of the times at home. Violence that can cause physical, sexual, and/or psychological suffering, moral and/or patrimonial damage, and, in the last case, death.

In the literary essay "Gospel of Sex", the journalist, radiobroadcaster and writer José de Paiva Netto, President of the LGW, affirms: "The crimes committed in the field of sexuality, in virtue of the human-spiritual instability, are a disease to be cured in the core of society. (...) Each person is unmistakably responsible for his or her acts before God, society and his/her own consciousness. We refer ourselves to the cowardly female trafficking; the commerce of Human Creatures; the sexual exploitation of children, youth, women and the girl child; to pedophilia; pornography; sexual harassment and so many other illnesses that need to be efficiently combated in a planetary scale. (...) It is necessary that the Human Being understands, definitely, that freedom infers responsibility, mainly in the field of Sex."

To understand this responsible freedom means to break off with the cycles of discrimination and violence perpetuated along the successive generations of a patriarchal society, in which the hierarchical structure is used as a form of oppression. In Brazil, one woman is beaten every 15 seconds. Seventy percent of the cases take place inside their homes. Besides this, only 10% of the Brazilian victims of violence file report. A research made in Brazil in 1998 by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), shows that domestic violence is the cause of one in every five absences of women at work. This makes Brazil lose annually 10.5% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), that is, approximately US$39 billion.

To expect the State to create changes for the resolution of the conflicts is not enough. The civil society needs to continue cooperating to reformulate its laws of global coexistence. And the Legion of Good Will, with initiatives directed specially towards the female universe, combats vehemently violence against women and the girl child. With these actions, the quality of life is reached by the rescue of self-esteem and the potentialities in the professional, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual fields.

Among the several actions carried out by the LGW on this issue, we point out the program Woman BEING: realization of educational lectures, workshops and job training courses that focus on the raise of the family income, offer guidance on women and girl child rights, prevention of

domestic violence and how to cultivate values which stimulate the harmony at home. Cases identified have juridical and psychological support with the help of professional volunteers. Besides all this, gathering groups stimulate the exchange of experiences and the search of solutions for the several levels of vulnerability, such as family planning and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases (STD).

One of the projects of this program is Baby-Citizen, which focuses on making the pregnant women aware of the importance of Love since the pre-natal phase, strengthening the affection bond between mother and child. The women participating in the project also receive complementary nourishment, support in all stages of pregnancy, orientation on breast-feeding and health, music therapy, besides first-aid and hygiene cares. The babies are taken care of since the mother's womb until the child makes through the most risky period of life, that is, until he/she reaches one year of age. All this work helps develop the autonomy of women and family cohesion, and makes the probability of these children becoming victims of violence decrease considerably.

Another challenge that the LGW helps overcome in Brazil concerns the exploitation of child labor. According to data of DIEESE (Inter Trade Union Department of Statistics and Socio-Economic Studies), published recently by the International Labor Organization (ILO), Brazil is among the countries with the highest rates of child labor. According to the Ministry of Social Development, despite the constitutional prohibition of work for those under the age of 16, it is estimated that about 2.7 million boys and girls between the ages of 5 and 16, practice activities irregularly. To complement, a research made by IPEA (Institute of Applied Economic Research) showed that there are 300 thousand children, between the ages of 5 and 9, working in the country.

Carrying on, many times, activities on the streets, in agriculture or domestic chores, the children and adolescents are submitted to mistreatments, sexual exploitation and abuse. Another aggravating fact of this sad reality is the increase of the illiteracy rate due to the great number of boys and girls that work and drop out of school for lack of time. The contribution given by the LGW for the eradication of this situation are its Elementary, Intermediate and High Schools (full and part time), besides socioeducational, sportive, musical, artistic, cultural and recreational activities, guaranteeing to those assisted the complete development according to the Declaration of Rights of Children and Adolescents.

In all the actions that the Legion of Good Will accomplishes, it applies the Ecumenical Citizen Pedagogy, a differentiated methodology with quality, which aims at the spiritual biopsychosocial progress of the Human Being. Proposed by Paiva Netto, it promotes universal values such as Ecumenical Spirituality and Solidarity. Thence the motto of the LGW's teaching facilities be: "Here we study. Brain and Heart are formed", uniting intellect and feeling. "While efficient education, desired by all those of common sense, does not prevail, any nation will suffer the captivity of the limitations imposed upon itself", defends the director of the LGW.

In 57 years of existence, the Legion of Good Will has exported its social technologies, and its programs and projects are present in other countries such as Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay,

Uruguay, Portugal and the United States of America. According to recent research held by Toledo & Associados, about 86% of the over 4 million annual assistances given by the organization are directed towards people of the female gender. The focus of this action is clear and intentional. "If you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a family." This phrase of the great North American educator Charles McIver (1860-1906) — quoted by Paiva Netto in his article "Women fixing the Nations" — reflects the work of the Legion of Good Will. It appoints that for effective changes to be made in this scene of violence, it is not enough to act only in the protection of the victim. It is also necessary to educate and make the family aware, and, consequently, the society.

The omission before any type of violence practiced against a woman and a girl child is a crime that insults Humanity in its most elevated essence, for she represents the origin of life. And the LGW does not refer here only to the biological generation of the Being. Paiva Netto goes on: "Women are not public spittoons. They have to be respected and valorized for what they represent to all of Humanity." But, in order to do so, they have to understand their role on the Planet. As a citizen, any Human Being born receives civil, social, political rights and, as Paiva Netto defends, spiritual rights as well. By not respecting these rules, the individual switches to the preying side of collectivity. Upon understanding the other with respect and dignity that bestows him the value of citizen, the Human Being-individual shall understand his/her role in society. "Sentiments of mercy, Love, Solidarity are", as the President of the LGW declares, "levers that shall rise from the ruins (moral, social, political etc. ruins) the Solidary Society that is not a utopian dream, far less an ideology. It is a proposal that commingles in exercising transnational Fraternity, without racial, gender, religious or whatever other frontiers there may be. In the Solidary Society, the individual understands that the body is far more than matter. It is the vehicle for transforming actions, abolishing individualistic sentiments that cooperate for the degeneration of entire collectivities".

For the director of the Legion of Good Will, "the great mission of the LGW is, above all, educational: to elucidate the people about themselves, that is, to promote Education and Culture with Spirituality so there may be Food, Health and Work for all, in the formation of the Ecumenical Citizen."

This way, the Organization has joined forces to help Brazil fulfill the 8 Millennium Development Goals, launched by the UN, as well as the convention that determines the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women and the girl child.

Beyond moral

The discussion on the theme is beyond the moralizing question; it is the reflex of the lack of spiritualized education of the mass. "If violence came out of the dark night, from the hidden places, and came to show itself in broad daylight, it is because it resides inside the human hearts. Existing in the souls and hearts, it will be present wherever the Human Being may be. (...) Great is the nation and wise the ruler that conciliates the values of his components of all races, creeds, political convictions... They are the builders of the true progress. It is worth mentioning that there will not be a good regime while Man is evil", points out Paiva Netto.

That is why the Legion of Good Will understands that it is necessary to have knowledge of the spiritual factors, in the analysis of the social facts like violence against women and the girl child, wars, crimes against the population and the nations, at last, in the search of the comprehension of the human logic. Only by this will Science be complete, as the President of the LGW declares: "There cannot be scientific studies of the human facts without doing the social research of the spiritual ones".

This rule can be applied for macro or micro processes, besides public and private plannings as well. Education, Politics, Religion and Science should be worked through the field of the Spirit, that is, of the sentiment transformed by the Law of Love, firmed on Jesus' New Commandment — "Love one another as I have loved you. Only by this shall you be recognized as my disciples, if you have the same Love for one another" (Christ's Gospel, according to John, 13: 34 and 35) —, symbol of eternal Love, which stimulates the constructive democratic-spiritual competence, and not the abuse of power. It is a proven experience, a strategy of planetary survival, in which the main exchange currency is not oil, nor the natural raw materials of a country, but, indeed, the culture of Peace, lived, defended and fostered by all the peoples.